

# Education in Emergencies: Critical Questions and Challenges<sup>1</sup>

by Marc Sommers

## Overview

Time and again, communities devise some sort of schooling for their children as soon as the disruptions of warfare or other humanitarian disasters begin to subside. This initial education response can begin quickly but usually provides only rudimentary educational instruction and structure. National and especially international agencies may arrive soon after this to support and dramatically expand such efforts.

**Education in Emergencies** can be defined as formal and nonformal education provided to children and youth whose access to education systems has been destroyed by war or other calamities.<sup>2</sup> This document will focus on war-affected contexts.

The Education in Emergencies field is generally divided into three overlapping phases:

- ▲ The Acute Phase: which features recreation activities and literacy and numeracy programming
- ▲ The Stabilization Phase: when formal education is re-started, especially primary education; and
- ▲ The Reconstruction Phase: when education systems are reestablished following conflicts.

In addition, all three phases tend to include educational modules as programming components. These inclusions are based on the recognition that emergencies change social circumstances and enlarge the realm of educational need. Depending on need and finances, an emergency education program may contain modules that address pressing concerns, such as:<sup>3</sup>

- ▲ Peace education/human rights/basic skills;
- ▲ HIV/AIDS prevention & reproductive health;
- ▲ Prevention of cholera and other diseases
- ▲ Landmine awareness; and
- ▲ Psychosocial programming

During the transitioning of the provision of education by communities to national and international agencies, significant challenges confront communities, agencies, and governments. Ten important challenges, and a selected list of resources for beginning to address them, are provided on the following pages.

1. Adapted from a presentation at the BEPS office at Creative Associates International, Inc., Washington, DC, on October 29, 2003.

2. Adapted from the definition on page 7 of "The Education Imperative: Supporting Education in Emergencies." Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development, and New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. Available at: <http://www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/EducationImperative.pdf>.

3. The "Matrix of Activities and Support Needed for Implementing an Emergency Education Program," designed by Margaret Sinclair and Carl Triplehorn provides a sense of immediate, short-term, and long-term emergency education responses. Available at: <http://inesite.org/core/matrix.asp>.



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# BEPS

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## 1 The Predominance of International Agencies and the Evolution of New System Forms

Wars tend to disempower governments and create space for international agencies to fill the vacuum. By providing education services to communities, UN and NGO agencies can assume the functions and responsibilities of Ministries of Education in the areas where they work. This is due to their high operational capacity and ability both to access funding and deliver educational services. By comparison, the government usually has, at best, a limited presence.

## 2 The Role of Communities

War-affected communities usually start the schools, but what is their role when international agencies arrive? Given the unavoidable differences in power between implementing agencies and affected communities, it is important to be consistently aware of the possibility that "community education" programming might become paternalistic.

## 3 The Role of National Government

War-affected national governments are often largely ignored by international agencies until student national examination accreditation and teacher certification needs surface as high priorities (perhaps 6-18 mos. after the emergency begins). With weak national governments and their Ministries of Education working with empowered international agencies, government legitimacy, sovereignty, and real control of the education program often are indirectly or overtly challenged. However unintentional, a national government that is effectively marginalized by international agency actions can generate deep resentments and negative responses. Governments may, for example, exercise their power by intentionally slowing down educational processes and the activities of international agencies.

## 4 A Mammoth Capacity Gap

It is common for the education authorities to have low technical and operational capacities. Nonetheless, international agencies may assign capacity building for education officials a low priority until the postwar period.

International agencies often do not adequately recognize or appreciate their contribution to the affected government's reduced capacity level. With pronounced differences in salaries, benefits, and status between working for the government and international agencies, many of the best qualified educationalists in the war-affected nation abandon the government system to work for international agencies instead. As this can dramatically exacerbate capacity challenges that already confront national governments, it needs to be addressed.

## 5 The Uneven Access to and Quality of Schools

During and following conflicts, unintended hierarchies of access tend to arise:

- ▲ Children and youth in refugee camps often have the best chance of gaining access to education. The quality of education may be high when compared to other war-affected students in the region.
- ▲ Students in IDP camps may have access to education as well, although it is often of much lower quality than the education provided by international agencies in refugee camps.
- ▲ In general, children and youth who reside in cities and remote rural areas (either in refugee asylum countries or within their war-affected country) tend to have the worst chance of attending school. This is a persistent, worldwide problem.
- ▲ Nonformal education is generally underfunded during and following wars—even while the need rapidly expands. Out-of-school youth in particular are generally overlooked.

In all of these cases, the highest degree of access is to primary education. Access to secondary, tertiary, and nonformal education programs tends to be minimal at best, and is sometimes nonexistent.

## 6 Formulaic vs. Adaptive Educational Approaches

Should international agencies introduce school kits, or should they develop and adapt a local education response? Is the best response a combination of the two? The two main kinds of school kits are the Teacher Emergency Package (TEP, UNESCO) and School-in-a-Box (UNICEF). There may (or may not) be resistance among refugee or IDP teachers against the introduction of school kits.<sup>4</sup>

## 7 Coordinating Education in Emergencies<sup>5</sup>

National education authorities frequently are not be situated at the center of the coordination structures, which tend to be dominated by international agencies. Donor coordination may be the most difficult component of coordination for education in emergencies. A contributing challenge is that each donor may have their aid restricted or "tied".

A related challenge can surface from shortsighted education goals, often largely due to the strains of addressing immediate needs with limited amounts of finances, capacity, and time. As a result, developing a coordinated, forward-looking education plan becomes a low priority that is often unrealized until the postwar period is well underway.

## 8 Inadequate Donor Funding During Emergencies

The Education for All (EFA) movement has inspired many major donors to become much more deeply committed to and involved in supporting education in emergencies, given the commitment of EFA signatories to increase access to education for all children, even those affected by wars. Nonetheless, some major donors are restricted by internal regulations from supporting education where conflicts persist. Others prefer to wait until there is peace before supporting education in conflict-affected zones. Funding shortfalls can significantly exacerbate deficiencies in the provision of education during emergencies, particularly when the emergencies are prolonged for years or even decades.

## 9 Educating Girls

In many war or postwar situations, parents of girls, particularly girls who have reached puberty, may be forced to choose between allowing their daughters to attend school or keeping them home as a protection measure. The threat of rape or child marriage can be considerable for girls. Girls' education programs may either fail to adequately acknowledge parents' fears and concerns or be unable to provide educational responses that address them.

## 10 Teachers

Teachers are the core of emergency education: if you have a teacher, you can start a school (of some sort). A persistent and largely unresolved problem concerns what teachers should be paid. Teacher salary or "incentive" levels are rarely coordinated between school programs existing between, for example, refugee and IDP camps. In addition, teacher certification is a constant concern. Will the teacher's home government accept and recognize the training certificates they received during the war?

4. The most comprehensive analysis of the "school kitting" issue is in Margaret Sinclair's book chapter, "Education in Emergencies," in *Learning for a Future: Refugee Education in Developing Countries*, Jeff Crisp, Christopher Talbot and Daiana B. Cipollone, eds. Geneva: UNHCR. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.ch/pubs/epau/learning-future/learningtoc.htm>.

5. The International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO, has recently published a book on this subject. It is entitled *Co-ordinating Education During Emergencies & Reconstruction: Challenges & Responsibilities*, by Marc Sommers ([www.unesco.org/iiep/eng/publications/recent/emerg.htm](http://www.unesco.org/iiep/eng/publications/recent/emerg.htm)).

# Selected Web Sources

## Websites

[www.ineesite.org](http://www.ineesite.org) - Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE)  
The most comprehensive site available.

[www.ginie.org](http://www.ginie.org) - Global Information Networks in Education (GINIE)  
A second important site with emergency education resources.

[www.unesco.org/iiep/eng/focus/emergency/emergency\\_1.htm](http://www.unesco.org/iiep/eng/focus/emergency/emergency_1.htm)  
International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO, has an ambitious "Education in Emergencies and Reconstruction" activity underway. Plans are to publish several case study monographs of education in emergencies, including Burundi, East Timor, Kosovo, Rwanda, Rwandan refugees, Sierra Leone, and Southern Sudan; and four thematic policy studies (coordination; validation of pupil qualifications for refugees, returnees, and internally displaced persons; teacher management during emergencies; and integration of youth-at-risk in post-conflict settings). There will also be a guidebook for educational authorities and ministries on planning and managing education in emergencies and reconstruction. IIEP has already developed and delivered training courses to build the capacity of war-affected Ministries of Education and agencies supporting them.

[www.ibe.unesco.org/Regional/social\\_cohesion/schome.htm](http://www.ibe.unesco.org/Regional/social_cohesion/schome.htm)  
International Bureau of Education, UNESCO, has a Curriculum Change and Social Cohesion in Conflict-affected Societies project that includes seven case study analyses of curriculum making with a peacebuilding approach (which address connections between violent conflict and schooling, and factors that shape curriculum reform intended to improve social cohesion). The case studies examine Bosnia-Herzegovina, Guatemala, Lebanon, Mozambique, Northern Ireland, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka.

## Other Resources

[www.odihpn.org/report.asp?ID=2525](http://www.odihpn.org/report.asp?ID=2525)  
Nicolai, Susan, and Carl Triplehorn. 2003. "The Role of Education in Protecting Children in Conflict." Humanitarian Practice Network Paper #42. London: Overseas Development Institute (March).

[www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/EducationImperative.pdf](http://www.aed.org/ToolsandPublications/upload/EducationImperative.pdf)  
Sommers, Marc. 2003. "The Education Imperative: Supporting Education in Emergencies." Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development, and New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.

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Prepared by:  
Marc Sommers  
Youth at Risk Specialist, CARE  
Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS)  
Activity

CARE, Inc.  
151 Ellis Street, NE  
Atlanta, GA 30303-2439

Prepared for:  
Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS)  
Activity  
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Creative Associates International, Inc.  
Washington, DC  
Prime Contractor

CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL, INC.  
5301 Wisconsin Avenue, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20015